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To the citizens of the belligerent States

by

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(Reprinting allowed and desired.)



We neutrals enjoy in these times many and undeserved privileges. Chief among them all, most certainly is, that we can continue our appreciation of the one half without despairing of the other half of civilized mankind.

Undoubtedly we too, with more or less vehemence, may lean rather to the one side than to the other. It has been said of us that our sympathies were neither for Germany nor for England, but for Holland, and it was actually believed that we should take the assumption as a compliment. Fortunately for the honour of our nation this is not so. We have not yet sunk to the level where the question of right and wrong becomes a matter of indifference so long as one's own interests are not affected. And we have all of us, each according to the measure of his information, and in some degree also to the dictates of his prejudices, given a reply to the question. There is a vast difference however between our party-leanings and those prevailing amongst the belligerents. Most of us, see at least two sides to the question, although perhaps more light may fall to the one side than to the other; but for the members of the belligerent States, the question appears to have only one side to it. Each unit is convinced that his country is making a stand, not only for its incontestable rights, but also for the highest interests of humanity; if others do not recognize this, he believes it can only be due to deliberate ill-will, and each member of the opponent Country, neglecting to make formal protest against the actions of his Government, gives good proof of that same ill-will. To such length scarcely one of us will go. We, to a certain extent at any rate, have retained the power to appreciate the standpoint not shared by us, and we are therefore less prone to condemn it unconditionally. This is not to be ascribed to a higher morality or better insight on our part, nor to the phlegmatic temperament we are commonly supposed to possess, but to the circumstance, that we, in our capacity as neutrals, get the arguments of both parties laid before us; and that we, to a certain extent again, are in a position to make a proper study of those arguments. The inhabitants of the belligerent countries, on the contrary, rarely hear or obtain anything to read, except what has been said or written from their own standpoint; and if they do happen to hear or read anything else, they will rarely deduct anything therefrom beyond what is conducive to their own view of the case. Of course this is only natural, being merely an enlargement of what takes places in party or family disputes. It is deeply deplorable nevertheless. The greatest evil of the war is not the untold misery which it carries in its train — its death-roll, its mutilations, the stricken widows and orphans, loss of home and possessions — but it is the rending of the great ideal of the brotherhood of nations which we had begun to cherish as our great hope of the future; the supplanting of mutual faith by suspicion, the denial of the human element



in the enemy, the hardening and insulating feeling of self-righteousness in a corrupt society devoted to its own selfish interests. To the neutrals, more than anybody, it must be left to stem this evil. Unlike the belligerents they are not cut off from other nations, but are kept au courant of the opinions held in the separate countries through the medium of newspapers, pamphlets, letters, etc.; and seeing how variously the different countries express themselves, relative to the causes which led up to the war, they can appreciate the dissimilarities which arise in regard to the right and wrong of the matter. It would be well if those concerned in the war could share this knowledge, or at least had the ability to imagine its existence. Or is this asking too much, and can we not expect that those suffering from the blows dealt by the enemy, should pay heed to the motives inspiring him? We hope this may still be possible. We hope that amongst you, citizens of the belligerent states, there will be many who will not hesitate to give their enemy his due, and even under these trying circumstances keep, not only their hands, but also their hearts, free from even a suspicion of injustice. Buoyed up by this hope, we urgently request you to give your earnest attention to the following brief summary of the ideas prevailing in the different headings, and to accept provisionally our assurance, that each contains an honest statement of the manner, in which the members of the different groups explain to themselves and to others the causes which have led up to the present war.

We will give Belgium the right to speak first:

"We have merely done what we considered our Right and Duty to do. It was within our Right to resist the invasion of our territory, which was wholly unprovoked; and it was our duty to uphold our neutrality as established by Treaties. Germany claimed from us, what she herself, in the same circumstances, would have repelled with scorn; she has perpetrated a double wrong, in having first entangled an innocent people in the toils of a devastating war, and then by setting open defiance to Treaties to which she had set her own Seal. Her original attempt to excuse her action under the plea of necessity, is confronted by the fact that the breach had long been premeditated, as the German military authorities themselves avow in their literature; in the resort afterwards to certain pretended agreements between England and Belgium, it was forgotten to reckon with the fact, that the documents which were said to be discovered, would, supposing them to have been genuine, only relate to an ipso facto violation of Belgian neutrality by Germany. Far from constituting a breach of neutrality, they on the contrary would give evidence of the intention to avoid such a contingency by every possible means. Finally Germany has waged war in Belgium under a system of barbarity which, in the given circumstances, is altogether unjustifiable."

We will now permit Germany and Austria to proceed:

"The entire fault of the war must be laid at the doors of Russia and England. Russia had long been desirous of recouping her defeat vis-a-vis Japan with a successful war, and at the same time to distract attention from the internal frictions; England was watching the gigantic strides taken by the industry and commerce of the German Empire



with growing envy, and unjustly considered that the supremacy of the sea, to which she had always laid claim, was being menaced by the formation of the German Fleet. Germany, on the contrary, at the cost of heavy sacrifices to herself, had maintained Peace for over forty years, and even now, had no desire to break the relations. When, at the instigation of Serbia, the Serajewo assassination took place, the German Emperor did his utmost to localize the conflict; and it was not until Russia had revealed her plans through secretly mobilizing, that the war, which had now become inevitable, was declared. And then, when France refused to keep aloof from the contest, Germany, seeing herself confronted by an overwhelming force which necessitated the swiftest possible action, could no longer respect the neutrality (already questionable) of Belgium. This action was seized upon by England as a pretext for the declaration of a war which she had already determined upon, Edward VII indeed having initiated a set of intrigues which aimed at the downfall of Germany. The manner finally, in which the war in Belgium has been conducted, is solely the fault of the Belgian People themselves, who proved such adepts in the practises of franc-tireurs, mutilation of the wounded, etc., that the German army was forced to adopt the severest possible measures in order to quell these irregularities."

Finally the Entente Powers have their say:

"The Entente was entered into for purely pacific reasons, it being solely intended to act as a deterrent to the ominous momentum of the Triple Alliance. Germany on the other hand, with her gigantic military system and overbearing attitude, was a constant menace to the peace of Europe. After the preposterous demands made by Austria to Serbia this summer, which were utterly untenable for any sovereign state, Germany could have saved the situation had she chosen to urge her Ally to exhibit a certain moderation of her demands; her refusal to do so, coupled with her opposition of Great Britain's proposals to convene a Conference, forced Russia to take steps for the protection of the threatened sister state; yet even then, a European war might have been averted if Germany, with the casting of her ultimatums right and left, had not cut off all attempts at a reconciliation. France was bound to come forward to the assistance of her Ally; Great Britain, who had a free hand, remained in dubio, and as in 1870, put the question to France and Germany, whether they were prepared to observe the neutrality of Belgium as guaranteed by Treaties. And it was only after this question had been answered by France in the affirmative and by Germany in the negative, that she felt morally obliged to enter into the conflict."

May I ask what impression you have obtained from the foregoing contentions?

Your primary impression of these various opinions will certainly be, that it is your own side, which gives the true version of the matter and that the other sides have dished up a tissue of lies and insinuations. But if you will permit me, I will put two questions before you, to which you



are bound to give answer, if you conscientiously desire to do none an injustice, even in thought.

Firstly: Do you think it at all likely that in a so long previously prepared and so complicated conflict as the one under discussion, justice and truth should have ranked themselves wholly on the one side, and their opposites all on the other? Would you yourself, supposing the case concerned a conflict of which you were merely a spectator, be prepared to endorse such a view? Now it appears differently to you; but must not you admit that your judgment may be more or less contorted by the same mistaken ideas as that of your opponent? It is an established truism that "Where one's treasure is, there one's heart is also", and man's whole nature rises up in revolt when he is in danger of being convinced of that which would rob his life of all its value. Are not the sources upon which you base your judgment almost exclusively one-sided? Have you consulted the official documents — the White-Books, Grey-Books, etc. — issued by the belligerent governments, in addition to those of your own? Have you never detected yourself skipping over less favourable reports relating to your own side, and dwelling repeatedly upon the more favourable ones? Can you deny that you prefer the companionship of those who are thoroughly convinced of the absolute justice of your Cause, to that of those who constantly come forward with some objection or reservation? And have not you yourself, when doubts have arisen within you, tried to hush them up with the thought that such a thing could not, and might not be? And knowing these to be the commonest and most dangerous forms of self-delusion, must not you admit the possibility that your judgment may possibly differ from that pronounced by a fully enlightened and impartial judge?

However I am here perhaps suggesting a superhuman effort, in asking you to admit this. We will therefore put it thus: — Your representation of the case gives the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; that of your adversary is a mass of errors. But here I put to you my second question, which, after all, is more to the point than my first: Cannot you understand that your adversary is forbidden to see the truth as you see it, and consequently must consider right what you consider wrong, and vice-versa? Endeavour for one single moment to put aside your own views and to put yourself into one of the situations described above; cannot you then, for that single moment, feel with your adversaries, and understand that they, who see the actual course of events in a totally different light to what you do yourself, must morally react differently? Or do you consider it beyond the bounds of reason, that anybody honestly disposed could possibly hold a different view of the question? Then look around. Have you never in slight personal disputes occurring in your circle, observed how people of whose strict honour you have not the slightest doubt, show themselves blind to what you consider to be the absolute truth? And how much easier it must be for misunderstandings to arise in cases which touch one so closely as the welfare, the existence and the honour of one's Country. You should take into account how the same one-sided information, the same incessant suggestion from without, and the same burning desire for the vindication of one's own Cause, which make the access to



your truth so very easy to you, are so many stumbling blocks for its admission by your enemies; and then ask yourself seriously if you, in their position, would have the moral courage to resist such a combination of influences. Indeed the persons on the opposite side may err, but they are human beings who are possessed of feelings similar to your own. You have had intercourse with them before, read their books, appreciated their works of science and art, and followed their endeavour to alleviate suffering and redeem wrongs; now, dare you actually believe that during the few days which elapsed between the end of July and the commencement of August, they have suddenly been converted into rapacious barbarians or greedy shopkeepers? Be sure they would not have entered into the field against you with the enthusiasm and braving of death which they have shown, unless they had been convinced that their Cause was far above the mere desire of conquests or increased business relations. Naturally you cannot conceive that they have a view of the question which is diametrically opposed to your own, and it would be futile to expect you to do so. What is beyond your imagination however, may be true all the same, and you may see that it must be true. You can theoretically comprehend, although you may not be able to make it real to yourself, that men and women whom you have formerly learnt to know as honourable and upright members of society, are not acting against their consciences, but solely because of their one-sided information and limited mental vision, when they hold for right, what you consider scandalous, and for truth what you feel to be an impudent lie. And should even this theoretical comprehension still be beyond you, I ask you to believe what every outsider who has remained in personal or written communication with your enemies will confirm to you, that they in common with yourselves, are equally convinced of having gone to battle from necessity and for the advancement of a just Cause.

After having carefully considered these things, you may perhaps, at the cost of some effort, begin to countenance the idea that when the war is over, you will be able to frankly extend your hand to the enemy of yore. It will then perhaps seem to you, as if you and he had been awakened from some terrible nightmare or temporary fit of insanity, during which you have both suffered yourself, and made others suffer. You will both stand gazing at the devastation which you have brought about, and reflect upon the wounds you have inflicted upon each other. You will begin to wonder what it was all about, and whether anybody really intended it. Little by little you will begin to acknowledge that it was no one's desire, but that, by a ghastly misunderstanding, each believed it was the other's desire, which caused so many elaborate precautions to be taken, that they got interpreted into war intimidations, until at last war itself was an accomplished thing. And then you will admit that after all it matters very little which of the rulers and diplomats has acted as liberator of the Monster of War, since after decades of mutual mistrust of the states, the chain which held him had become so worn that he would anyway have broken loose within another few years' time.

But there is another question we must consider when this war will have drawn to a close and Peace sheds its benign influence upon the



wounds that have been inflicted: how long will it last? For how long will the nations of Europe be left in peace, to try and restore the havoc of the past few months as best they may? How long will it be before our Continent is subjected to another such attack of frenzy, that will claim fresh victims and alienate the nations anew? And above all, for how long, time after time, shall we have to ask this question, when shall we, or shall we never see peace unbroken by war?

It appears to me, that in principle at any rate, the latter question admits of a feasible answer. A peace which shall outlast war will settle down when the mutual mistrust between the states has been removed. In that mistrust and in nothing else, lies the actual menace to Peace. Much has been said concerning conflicts of interests that can only be solved by the power of the sword; if one looks closer, the conflicts appear to be, nearly without exception, the outcome of mutual suspicion. What reason is there for a state to make conquests, if not to get more defensible frontiers, to increase the army and exchequer and so to be on better guard against the dreaded attack of a neighbour? Why come forward to the assistance of allies, even though the cause be unjust, unless, with possible personal difficulties, the aid of the allies can be similarly called upon? Why desire the possession of harbours and colonies, if not from the fear that those of other states may be closed? What objection can there be to the rapid economic progress of a neighbouring country except that it thereby becomes an increasingly dangerous rival? Such is the prevailing situation everywhere. If a state had no cause to fear outside attack, or impediments to progress, it is difficult to conceive a motive, warranting, in the remotest degree, the catastrophes attendant upon war. Experience teaches us plainly that the serious conflicts of interests disappear immediately when the several states unite into a federation, which excludes mutual attacks, and governs the rights which the citizens of one state are entitled to, in another. Look for instance at the relations existing in the federations of Germany, Switzerland, and the United States of North America. There war has practically ceased to exist. The histories of these federated states furnish the empirical confirmation of what has already been remarked, and a mark for the future at the same time. Wherever the states have united into a federation they have abandoned their mutual mistrust of each other and ceased to make war, and it will not be before the civilized nations recognize federation as the sole means of disbanding mistrust that a lasting peace can be secured.

And therefore it is above all so highly important, that you, to whatever nation you may belong, should already during the war, be pervaded with the idea that your enemies are no demons, no savage beasts or cynical egoists, but men like yourself, with the same failings, the same shortcomings and the same ideals. Possibly they, even more so than yourself, may have been deluded by their governments and press; nevertheless, they, like yourself, are acting in good faith. And deep-rooted in one and all lies the desire for peace and justice. If you truly desire, as you and your adversaries are so constantly asserting, a peace which will make your enemy "harmless" for good, I pray you to consider the best means of attaining your desire. If you pursue the old course of levying indemnities, wresting territory and limiting the powers of resistance of the



vanquished one, the result will be the same as heretofore; arrogance on the one side and rancour and thirst for vengeance on the other, and you will have sown abundant seed for fresh wars. If, on the contrary, you make an appeal to the better part of man, then it will rise to meet you. Only fear can subdue a savage animal; but man, at least the cultured specimen of our days, requires something more — the establishment of justice. Give him that, and you will have made him in very deed: Harmless for good and all.

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The committee „The European Federation”, being convinced:

that the relations of civilised states toward each other should be governed by the same laws of morality and justice as social life in the nations individually;

that in the first instance the creation of a narrow bond on the basis of equality of rights and preservation of their individuality is desirable for the present European states;

begs fervently every individual, as well as all organisations that are of the same conviction, to co-operate with all possible energy in the formation of public opinion in that direction and to inform our committee of the same.

DR. FREDERIK VAN EEDEN.

PROF. DR. G. HEYMANS.

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DR. B. DE JONG VAN BEEK EN DONK.

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(Secretary, Blaricum-Holland.)

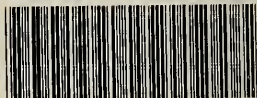
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